

Message Text

SECRET

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ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 AF-08 EUR-12 ISO-00 IO-13 CIAE-00 DODE-00
PM-04 H-01 INR-07 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01
SP-02 SS-15 USIA-06 OMB-01 AID-05 IGA-02 /097 W
-----041133Z 020190 /21

R 041052Z MAR 77
FM AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 2041
INFO AMEMBASSY ADDIS ABABA
AMCONSUL ASMARA
AMEMBASSY BEIRUT
AMEMBASSY JIDDA
AMEMBASSY KHARTOUM
AMEMBASSY LONDON
AMEMBASSY MOGADISCIO
AMEMBASSY ROME
AMEMBASSY TRIPOLI

S E C R E T DAMASCUS 1464

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PFOR SY ET PLO
SUBJECT: ERITREANS NEGOTIATE WITH PLO FOR ARMS SUPPLY

1. ITALIAN EMBOFF TOLD US MARCH 3 THAT SENIOR ITALIAN INTELLIGENCE OFFICIAL HAD ARRIVED IN DAMASCUS FEB 28 AND MET WITH PLF LEADER OSMAN SABBE SAME NIGHT. EMBOFF WAS PRESENT DURING PORTION OF TALKS, WHICH COVERED WIDE VARIETY OF TOPICS. OF PRIMARY INTEREST WAS SABBE'S ASSERTION THAT NEGOTIATIONS BETWEEN FATAH AND PLF MEDIATED BY SYRIANS TO ARRANGE FOR SHIPMENT OF EXCESS PALESTINIAN WEAPONS TO ERITREANS HAD REACHED "ADVANCED STAGE." EMBOFF SAID SABBE MENTIONED SYRIANS WERE PRESSING FATAH TO TURN OVER MANY HEAVY AND LIGHT WEAPONS THEY POSSESS IN LEBANON TO ERITREAN GURRRILLAS. SYRIANS APPARENTLY FEEL THIS WOULD PROVIDE SOME MEASURE OF FACE-SAVING FOR PALESTINIANS IN LEBANON AND WOULD ASSURE SARG

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THAT PALESTINIANS NOT HIDING THEIR WEAPONS.

2. SABBE THEN SKETCHED PLF RELATIONS WITH VARIOUS COUNTRIES. HE CLAIMED PLF HAD BROKEN ITS TIES COMPLETELY WITH LIBYA. HE SEEMED PLEASED WITH ASSISTANCE ERITREANS RECEIVING FROM SUDANESE, AND SAID GOS PROVIDING THEM WITH LOGISTICAL SUPPORT AND USE OF SUDANESE TERRITORY FOR THEIR ACTIVITIES ACROSS

BORDER IN ETHIOPIA. SABBE PERCEIVED US STANCE TOWARD ERITREAN CAUSE AT PRESENT AS "CONTRADICTORY," BUT EXPRESSED CONFIDENCE THAT US WOULD ULTIMATELY SUPPORT ERITREANS. ITALIAN STATED SABBE MADE NO MENTION OF PRES CARTER'S AID CUTBACK TO ETHIOPIA ON GROUNDS OF HUMAN RIGHTS, AND SURMISED SABBE MAY NOT HAVE BEEN AWARE OF THIS DEVELOPMENT AT TIME MEETING TOOK PLACE. SABBE SAID HE UNDERSTOOD SOMALIS WERE UNHAPPY WITH CURRENT STATUS OF THEIR RELATIONSHIP WITH SOVIETS. FROM SABBE'S COMMENTS, ITALIAN EMBOFF DERIVED IMPRESSION SABBE BELIEVED SOMALIAN GOVT CONTEMPLATING SOME RESTRICTIONS ON SOVIET PRESENCE IN SOMALIA.

3. ITALIAN STATED SABBE HAD RECENTLY BEEN SPENDING HIS TIME IN KHARTOUM IN JIDDA. HIS VISIT TO DAMASCUS WAS OF SHORT DURATION, PRIMARILY TO MEET WITH ITALIAN. SABBE PLANS TO VISIT LONDON SHORTLY, AND WILL PASS THROUGH ROME AND DAMASCUS ON RETURN TO SUDAN.
MURPHY

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NNN

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